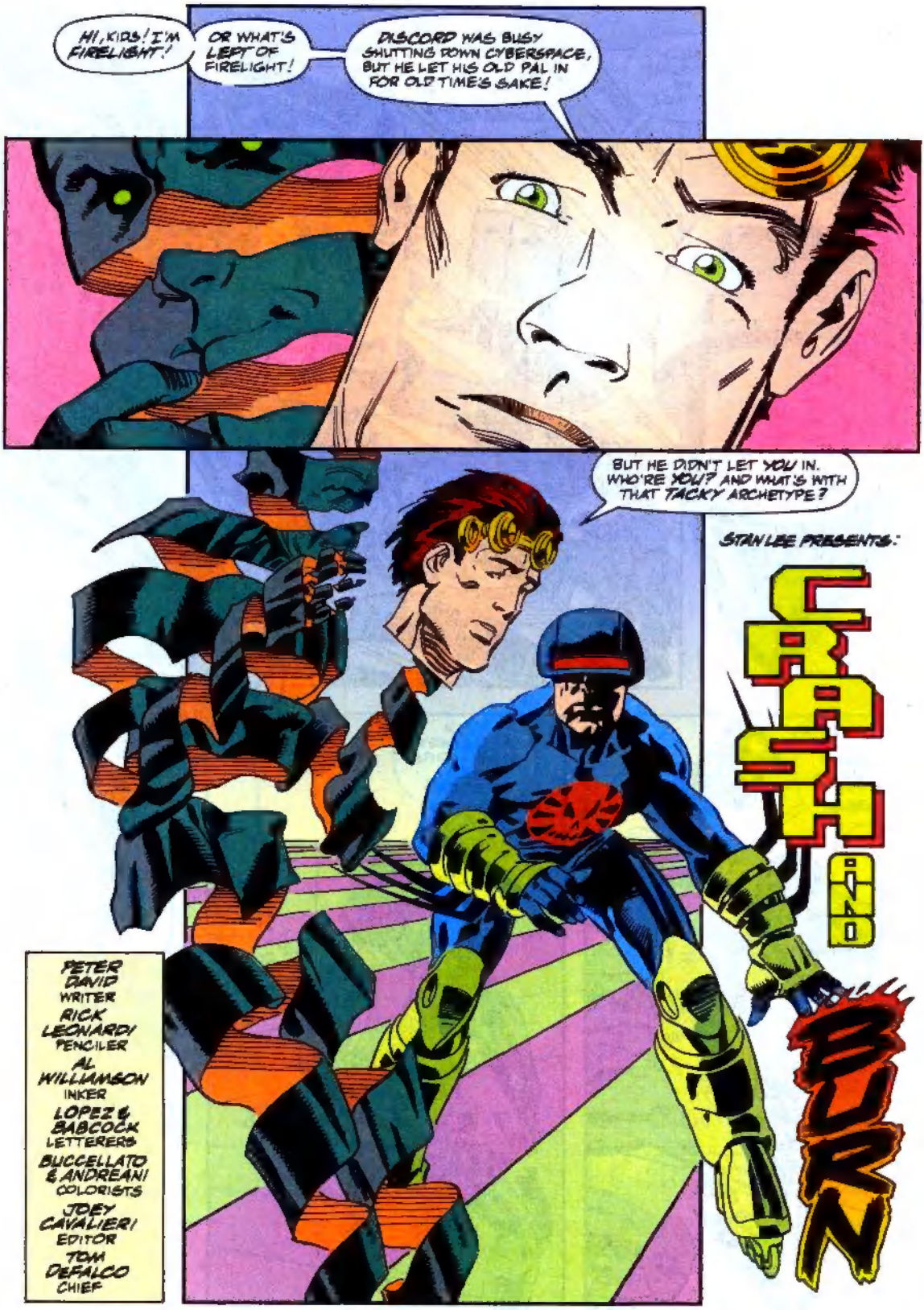
HI, KIDS! I'M FIRELIGHT!
OR WHAT'S LEFT OF FIRELIGHT!
DISCORD WAS BUSY SHUTTING DOWN CYBERSPACE, BUT HE LET HIS OLD PAL IN FOR OLD TIME'S SAKE!
BUT HE DIDN'T LET YOU IN. WHO'RE YOU? AND WHAT'S WITH THAT TACKY ARCHETYPE?
STAN LEE PRESENTS:
CRASH AND BURN
PETER DAVID WRITER
RICK LEONARDI PENCILER
AL WILLIAMSON INKER
LOPEZ & BABCOCK LETTERERS
BUCCELLATO & ANDREANI COLORISTS
JOEY CAVALIERI EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO CHIEF

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CUTE PARTY TRICK, HUH?
BE BRUTALLY HONEST: COULD YOU SEE MY LIPS MOVING?
YOU INHUMAN SLIMEBAG!!!
OKAY, LOOK, SQUID. HERE'S THE DEAL.
I'M A VISIONARY. VISIONARIES NEED SIDEKICKS.
QUIXOTE AND SANCHO. HOLMES AND WATSON. WATSON AND CRICK.

CHEE! ASK A CIVIL QUESTION, AND SUDDENLY EVERYBODY'S AN ENTERTAINMENT CRITIC.
NOW--YOU CAN BE MY SIDEKICK FOR A WHILE. OR YOU CAN TELL ME TO CRAM IT, EFFECTIVELY COMMITTING SUICIDE, SQUID.
TAKE YOUR TIME. NO HURRY.

HOW DO YOU THINK IT'S GOING IN THERE?
DUNNO. FROM WHAT GABRI'S TOLD ME, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN CYBERSPACE.
CRUD.
NEVER GONNA GET MY HAIR BACK TO NORMAL--!
GABRI, DO YOU HAVE ANY SPRAY AROUND--?
OH. YEAH.
MRS. O'HARA, FOR PITY'S SAKE--!
SORRY. I'M BEING RUDE. HERE. HAVE A SWIG.
I DON'T WANT ANY!
HOW CAN YOU BE DRINKING?! IF CYBERSPACE IS CRASHING WITH THEM IN THERE...
YOU COULD LOSE BOTH YOUR SONS!
THAT'S HOW I CAN BE DRINKING.

YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME, AND I'M RUNNING OUT OF PATIENCE.
GABRIEL...?
PULL THE PLUG.
WELL?
OKAY. OKAY, THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY WAY OUT OF THIS. SO YOU, UH... YOU WIN.
OH, GOOD!
WAIT!

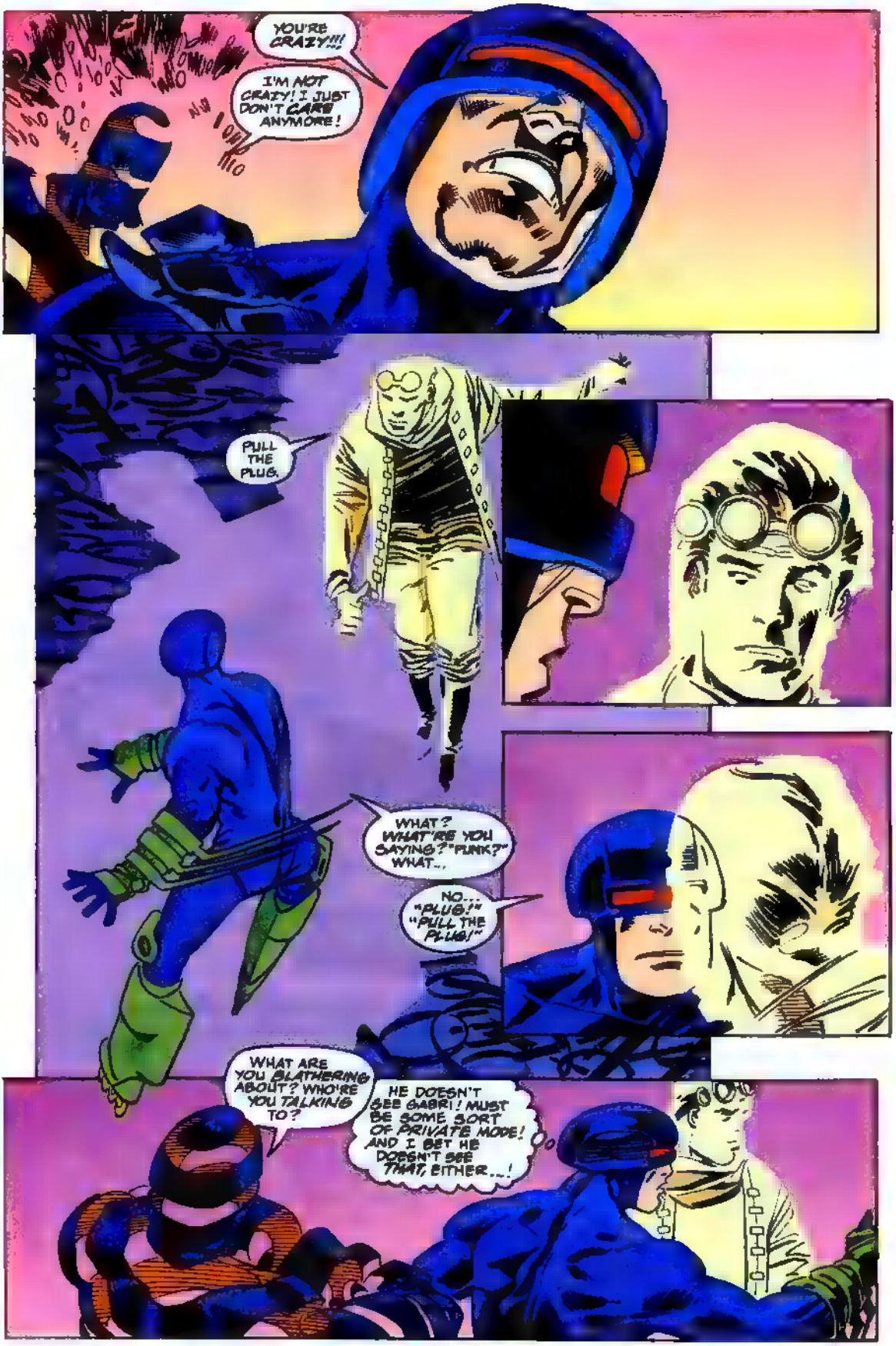
HELLLLPP!
HUH?
WH...WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?
DISK DRIVES.
YOU'LL GET THE HANG OF MANEUVERING THEM IN NO TIME. THEY'RE NOT HARD.
IN FACT, THEY'RE KIND OF FLOPPY.
COME, SANCHO! WE'RE GOING ON A TOUR.
A TOUR OF WHAT?
THAT WHICH NEVER WAS AND, IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, WILL NEVER BE AGAIN.

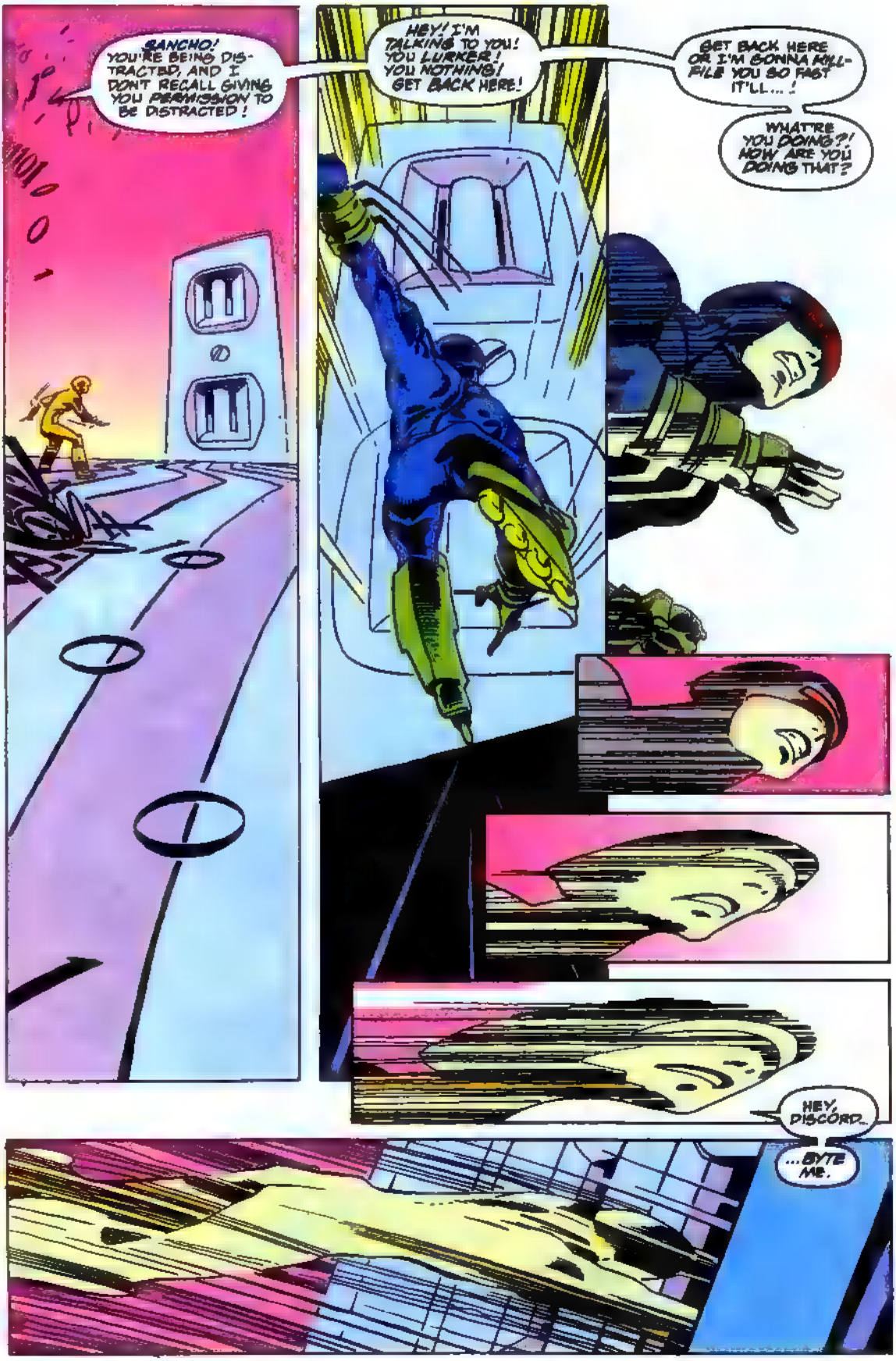
UP AHEAD, SANCHO, IS ONE OF THE CYBERNET INFORMATION CENTERS.
TRILLIONS UPON TRILLIONS OF BITS OF INFORMATION PASS THROUGH HERE EVERY SECOND, TO BE DISSEMINATED THROUGHOUT THE NET.
FREQUENTLY, THE STREETS ARE LINED WITH ARCHETYPES, GLIDERS, SKIMMERS...
PEOPLE WHO PLUG RIGHT IN BECAUSE HOME POINT PROCESSING DON'T FLOAT THEIR BOAT.
NOTICE THERE'S NO ONE AROUND NOW, SANCHO.
I LOCKED THEM ALL OUT.
BECAUSE I GOT THE KEY TO THE SHOCKIN' CITY.
DON'T BLINK... 'CAUSE YOU'RE ABOUT TO SEE SOME SERIOUS NUMBER CRUNCHING.

GENTLEMEN... I HEARD YOUR RAISED VOICES FROM DOWN THE HALL. SUCH DISPLAYS OF TEMPERAMENT ILL-SUIT STARK-FUJIKAWA EXECUTIVES.
HIKARU-SAMA! WE... WE HAD HEARD THAT YOUR VEHICLE WAS DESTROYED! YOU WERE...!
PRESUMED DEAD?
UNDERSTANDABLE BUT INCORRECT.
NOW, GENTLEMEN... THE FIRST THING WE MUST ATTEND TO ARE OUR OWN COMPUTER NEEDS.
THE CITY MAY BE FALLING APART, BUT WE MUST MAKE SURE OUR PRIVATE BACK-UP FILES ARE PROTECTED. PLUS...
...WE HAVE A GREATER PROBLEM TO CONSIDER.
WHAT COULD BE "GREATER" THAN OUR COMPUTER NEEDS, HIKARU-SAMA?
A MATTER OF HONOR.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THERE WAS AN INCIDENT CALLED THE DOMINO CRASH.
THE PLAN WAS MINE, AND WAS THWARTED BY SEVERAL SUPREME BANKTANKS, INCLUDING YOUR FRIEND, FIRELIGHT.
THE GENERAL PUBLIC WAS UNAWARE. LURKERS AND CASUAL USERS--"FLOOZIES," WE CALL THEM--KNEW ONLY THE BAREST OF DETAILS.
AND THOSE WHO WERE IN THE LOOP THOUGHT I'D BEEN BRAIN-FRIED IN THEIR COUNTERATTACK...
BUT NOW THEY'RE GONE AND I'M HERE FOR A SHORT TIME MORE.
BUT WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!

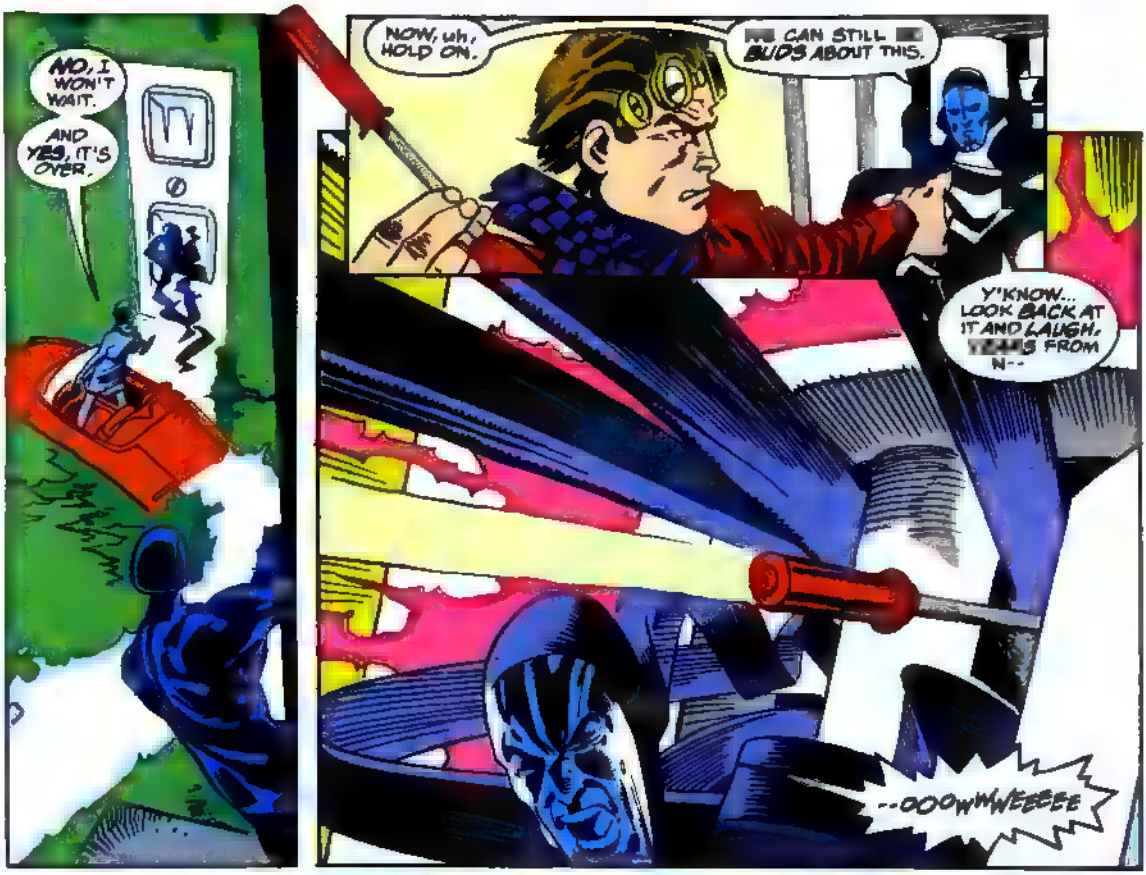
WHY?!?
BECAUSE I CREATED THE ULTIMATE TIME-LINE PREDICTION PROGRAM, THAT'S WHY!
ASIMOV POSTULATED IT, BUT I DID IT! A PROGRAM TO FORETELL WORLD EVENTS!
I'VE SEEN THE FUTURE, SANCHO, AND IT SUCKS EGGS!
MY PROJECTIONS INDICATE THAT CIVILIZATION CRASHES IN 2112! END OF THE WORLD, FINISH, DONE, PACK THE BAGS, CALL THE FRONT DESK, WE ALL IS CHECKING OUT!
BUT BEING A HUMANITARIAN, I THOUGHT I'D EASE MANKIND INTO ARMAGEDDON, BY DESTROYING THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY.
GIVE THEM A LIGHT TASTE OF OBLIVION RATHER THAN MAKE THEM CHOKE THE WHOLE THING DOWN AT ONCE.

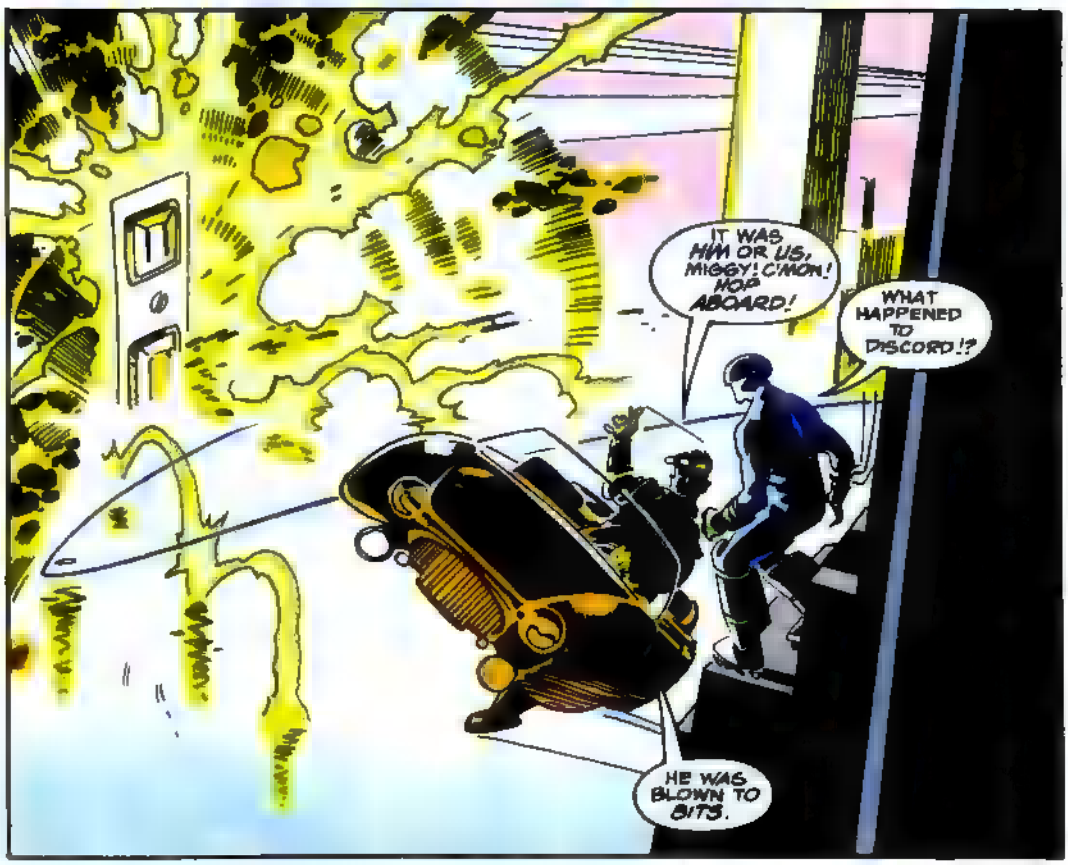

YOU'RE CRAZY!!!
I'M NOT CRAZY! I JUST DON'T CARE ANYMORE!
PULL THE PLUG.
WHAT? WHAT'RE YOU SAYING? "PUNK?" WHAT...
NO... "PLUG!" "PULL THE PLUG!"
WHAT ARE YOU BLATHERING ABOUT? WHO'RE YOU TALKING TO?
HE DOESN'T SEE GABRI! MUST BE SOME SORT OF PRIVATE MODE! AND I BET HE DOESN'T SEE THAT, EITHER...!


SANCHO! YOU'RE BEING DISTRACTED, AND I DON'T RECALL GIVING YOU PERMISSION TO BE DISTRACTED!
HEY! I'M TALKING TO YOU! YOU LURKER! YOU NOTHING! GET BACK HERE!
GET BACK HERE OR I'M GONNA KILL-FILE YOU SO FAST IT'LL... !
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?! HOW ARE YOU DOING THAT?
HEY, DISCORD.
...BYTE ME.

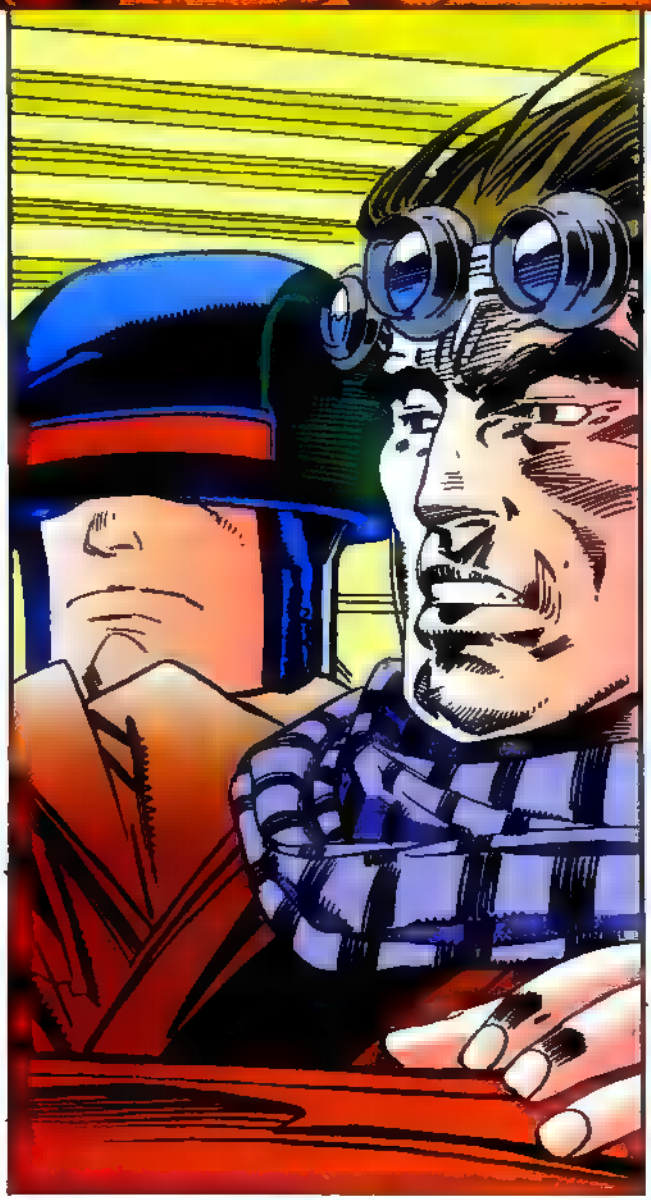
DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME I GOT LEFT, BUT [redacted] FALLS APART, [redacted] I GO WITH IT!
THERE! [redacted] OLD-STYLE DRAIN-PLUG! THAT'S GOTTA BE IT, [redacted] "IT" IS!
TRUST MY BROTHER TO--
SO YOUR "BROTHER" HAD A HIDDEN BACK-UP FILE RIGHT UNDER MY NOSE! A FAIL-SAFE, IN CASE I RETURNED! HOW MARVY-POO!
MISS ME, SANCHO?
NOT THIS TIME. I WON'T!
URKH!!
STOP THAT! GET OFF ME!
IT'S TOO LATE! YOU'VE LOST!

IF I'VE LOST, WHY DO YOU SOUND PANIC-STRICKEN?
C'MON, BABE, DON'T LET ME D--
--OOWWWNNN!!!
A BITSTREAM!!
IF I'M NOT CAREFUL, I'LL DROWN IN DATA!
GEEZ. THIS IS A SICKENINGLY APT METAPHOR FOR THE INFORMATION AGE.
THE BUILDINGS! THE INFORMATION CENTER... IT'S BEING REBUILT! THE FLOOD OF FACTS! IT WORKED!
FIRELIGHT! THIS ISN'T OVER YET! JUST WAIT TILL I PULL MYSELF TOGETHER, AND--!


NO, I WON'T WAIT.
AND YES, IT'S OVER.
NOW, uh, HOLD ON.
WE CAN STILL BUDS ABOUT THIS.
Y'KNOW... LOOK BACK AT IT AND LAUGH, YEAH FROM N--
--OOOWWWEEEEE

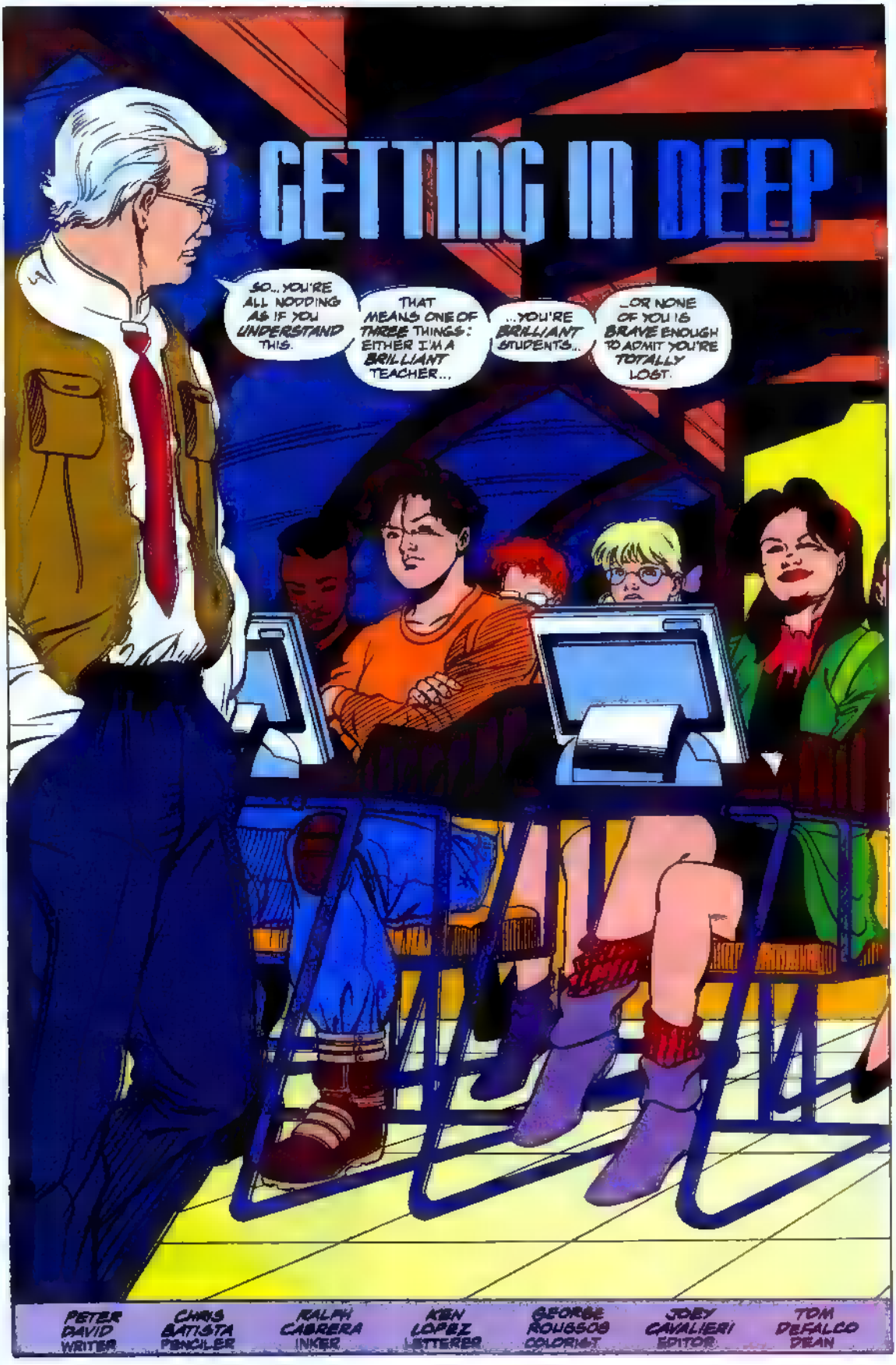

IT WAS HIM OR US, MIGGY! C'MON! HOP ABOARD!
WHAT HAPPENED TO DISCORD!?
HE WAS BLOWN TO BITS.

THANKS FOR COMING IN AFTER ME. MY BACK-UPS WOULD HAVE BROUGHT MY ARCHETYPE BACK ON LINE EVENTUALLY... BUT NOT FAST ENOUGH.
YEAH, WELL, YOU WERE AN IDIOT TO GET YOURSELF INTO THIS FIX. AFTER ALL THIS TIME, YOU'RE GETTING BACK INTO PLUGGING IN?
YOU KNOW WHAT AN ADDICTION THAT IS FOR YOU.


WE ALL HAVE OUR WEIRD ADDICTIONS. AT LEAST I'M NOT ADDICTED TO RUNNING AROUND IN A BLACK COSTUME...
...CLIMBING WALLS AND SAVING THE WORLD...
...LIKE MY BROTHER, SPIDER-MAN.

NEXT:

"WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY...?!"


GETTING IN DEEP
SO... YOU'RE ALL NODDING AS IF YOU UNDERSTAND THIS.
THAT MEANS ONE OF THREE THINGS: EITHER I'M A BRILLIANT TEACHER...
...YOU'RE BRILLIANT STUDENTS...
...OR NONE OF YOU IS BRAVE ENOUGH TO ADMIT YOU'RE TOTALLY LOST.
PETER DAVID WRITER
CHRIS BATISTA PENCILER
RALPH CABRERA INKER
KEN LOPEZ LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST
JOEY CAVALIERI EDITOR
TOM DEFALCO DEAN

I'M CLUELESS, SIR.
I MEAN, AT FIRST I THOUGHT I HAD IT, BUT THEN IT JUST KINDA SLIPPED AWAY.
"AN HONEST MAN'S THE NOBLEST WORK OF GOD."
SO SPAKE ALEXANDER POPE.
HAVE YOU EVER ESPIED WORKS OF POPE, MISTER...
O'HARA? OR HAVE YOU EYES ONLY FOR MISS KWAN?
REMEMBER, AT THIS SCHOOL, TEACHERS-- ESPECIALLY HOLO-PROJECTED ONES-- HAVE EYES IN THE BACKS OF THEIR HEADS.

HI. I'M MIGUEL. SORRY I EMBARRASSED YOU, "MISS KWAN."
XINA. AND YOU DIDN'T. OLD HOFFMAN LOVES TO JUMP ON PEOPLE.
SO WHAT'S YOUR FIELD OF INTEREST, MIGUEL?
EVERYTHING, I GUESS. GENETICS IS KIND OF NICE. AND YOU?
ON THE RECORD... A.I.
AND OFF THE RECORD?
E.T.s.
WHAT'S SO OFF THE RECORD ABOUT THAT?
I'M NOT SURE. BUT WHEN I FIRST MENTIONED IT, I WAS TOLD FLAT OUT "NO" THERE'S SOMETHING WEIRD WITH ALCHEMAX AND E.T.s... EVEN WEIRDER, CONSIDERING EARTH WAS ONCE CRAWLING WITH 'EM.
GEDOUTTA HERE!
THE HISTORY TEXTS TRY TO HUSH IT UP, BUT IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO L--
WOW! KRON, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?!
FELL.
YOU THE NEW KID? MIGUEL?
UHH... YEAH.

YEAH, WELL I'M THE ONE WHO DUMPED WATER ON YOU. JUST WANTED TO SAY I WAS SORRY.
IT WAS JUST, Y'KNOW, A JOKE. NO HARD FEELINGS.
O... OKAY.
WHO IS THAT GUY?
KRON STONE. REAL BRIGHT, BUT ERRATIC. HIS DAD'S SOME BIG ALCHEMAX GUY.
Y'MEAN TYLER STONE?
YEAH. THAT'S IT.
SO WHERE YOU OFF TO?
THE POOL. WANT TO MEET ME DOWN THERE?
UH... SURE.
I CAN'T BE MINCING AROUND THE WATER WHEN X'INA GETS HERE. GOTTA JUST GET IN.
THIS IS RIDICULOUS.
YOU'D THINK THEY COULD HEAT THE THING RIGHT.

WELL... THIS ISN'T SO BAD, I GUESS.
TO BE CONTINUED...